

MAY 1 1946

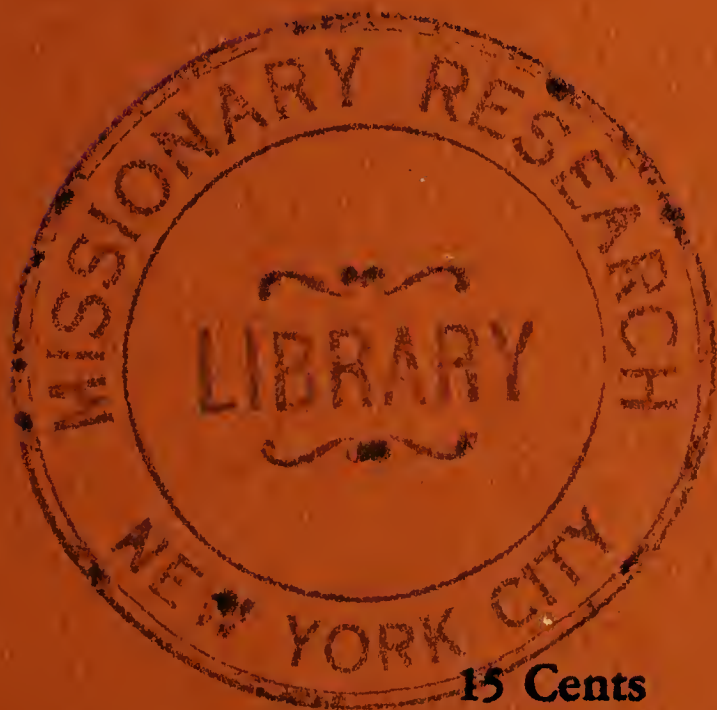
Miracle Man of the Moros

The Story of

FRANK C. LAUBACH

By

ENOCH BELL



15 Cents

STUDENT VOLUNTEER MOVEMENT

156 Fifth Avenue, New York

Miracle Man of the Moros

Frank C. Laubach

by

ENOCH BELL

“ONE HUNDRED THOUSAND LEARN TO READ!”

“That was the headline in a Philippines newspaper a few years ago which called attention to a man now known internationally as the ‘Apostle of Literacy.’ He is an American. He is an author, educator, psychologist. He is a Christian missionary. His name is Frank C. Laubach, Ph.D.” We are quoting from a newspaper release in the autumn of 1941, advertising a dynamic missionary speaker.

“Hailed by some as the ‘Miracle Man of the Moros,’” this release goes on to say, “Frank Laubach is unquestionably the best-loved man in Northern Mindanao, home of the still fierce and once continuously warlike Moslem Moros. He is their friend—and they know it. He understands their psychology. He has invented an alphabet whereby they can learn to read and write in an incredibly short time.

“This work of literacy begun by Dr. Laubach in the Philippines among the Moros did not stop there. Neighboring provinces in the Islands saw the barometer of literacy rising in Mindanao, and the Governor General, senators, and educators throughout the Philippines studied the plan and asked Dr. Laubach’s help on other dialects.

“Then calls came from other lands: from India—where he has been twice; from Ceylon, Malaysia, Turkey, Africa, Mexico, South America. He has worked on charts in Hindi, Marathi, Telegu, Tamil, Urdu, Dholo, Swahili, and other dialects. Some forty languages have had his system adapted to them!”

In 1901, at the age of seventeen and while at a state normal school, Frank Charles Laubach became interested in the Philippines through some friends who went out to the Islands as American teachers under the United States Government. At his prep school some three years later, he was induced to read several missionary biog-

raphies by one of his teachers, who afterward went to India. At Princeton, he purposed to become a foreign missionary; and at Union Seminary, in his desire to find the "most difficult field" he possibly could, he passed by eleven openings for service in America to accept the call of the American Board for work in Mindanao, then the "hardest and most undeveloped field" the Board had. On April 13, 1912, he wrote to the Board in Boston: "We have decided that we want to take the island of Mindanao."

The "we" included his fiancée, Effa Seely of his home town, Benton, Pennsylvania, who at the time was night superintendent at the Presbyterian Hospital in Philadelphia. The couple made this decision together just before their marriage, when Frank was a student at Union and taking courses at Columbia. It was a decision that led them into terrible hardships in bad climates, into heart-rending separations, into the tragic loss of their two sons through lack of hospital facilities, into great loneliness from a sense of being forgotten at times in their pioneer work, into overwhelming adverse conditions because of the superstition and moral inertia of the people for whom they labored, and yet withal into the joys and satisfactions of a life lived together for God and the underprivileged that has shown results in transformed minds and society.

Upon graduating from Union in 1913, Laubach took a year to complete his Ph.D. work at Columbia. By January, 1915, he and his bride were able to set forth, and on the twenty-sixth of February of that year they landed at Davao, southeastern Mindanao, then the only station of the Board on that great island. Here they "coveted for Christ" the thousands of Filipinos, Japanese, Chinese, Spaniards, and Americans who were crowding into that "frontier mushroom city," and especially the fifteen pagan tribes in the hills and forests behind the town who were getting their first taste of a new and fascinating civilization. Here, too, Laubach began those vigorous letters of vision and appeal that became so effective in the development of the work in Mindanao.

But the Laubachs could not remain at Davao. They must press on to regions wholly "unoccupied." The great northern coast of the island called them. So the summer of 1915 found them at Cagayan, capital of Misamis Province, full of descendants of those exiled "criminals" of the Spanish period who, like their hero, Rizal, dared to stand against the enslaving forces in Church and State and to fight for religious and social freedom. Here Laubach was

swamped with pleas for help, educational and religious. "Nearly every city on the North Coast," he wrote, "represents a need, a call, an urgent request to me within the few weeks I have been here. I am surprised to find with what hope they have heard of our coming. They are expecting too much, and this tempers one's joy with desperation."

More than half of the Filipinos in that "overripe field," as Laubach called it, had broken away from the Roman Catholic Church and had followed Bishop Aglipay in an independent movement. They were therefore peculiarly open to the intelligent *religious* message of the evangelical preacher. Naturally, the Laubachs sought to merge their efforts with that of Aglipay and his clergy; but when this was opposed, they found it necessary to turn to a strictly Protestant movement, although remaining friendly to the other movement.

To get things moving, Laubach bombarded the Board with letters of appeal. "Things are started," he cried. "We must keep up with them, or else they will wander off into some new sect or superstition. We have the Gospel they need. The time is short. . . . The burden of lives, of generations to come, hangs over my neck more and more as each day passes."

The work grew apace. Workers, foreign and Filipino, came to the rescue. Schools, churches, dormitories, and a hospital came into being. And today the Evangelical Church of the Philippines is established among that promising people of northern Mindanao, and established to stay.

This experience at Cagayan drove home to Laubach the pressing need of developing a trained Filipino leadership for the growing church in Mindanao, and when his vision covered the entire archipelago, as it soon did, he was glad to accept an invitation to teach in the Union Theological Seminary at Manila. Accordingly, at the beginning of 1922, he and Mrs. Laubach were at the nation's capital hard at work among the thousands of students there.

"A profound need of the Philippines," he wrote soon after reaching Manila, "is a spiritual and Christian leadership. We are putting more effort into ringing out the challenge to young men to enter the ministry, with the result that many are now coming. We have Student Volunteer Bands in about eight places, and hope to extend them to several provinces of the Islands. Where we shall find meth-

ods of support for these men as they seek the Seminary is a real problem."

Space does not permit us to speak in detail of Laubach's constructive work in behalf of a Union (Filipino) Church in Manila, composed largely of students of different religious traditions and connections—Catholic, Protestant, Mohammedan, and nothing; of his great evangelistic work among the high schools throughout the Islands; of the telling use he made of his furloughs in finding friends and funds for the projects dearest to his heart, in stimulating students in America to lay down their lives where they could count for most, in writing books¹ to help educate the American public, in arousing the ministers and church members at his "home base" to their opportunities for serving the underprivileged in his field, and in leading earnest Christian workers here into a deeper Christian life. He even qualified as mission treasurer, thanks to the careful keeping of accounts by his wife. She has throughout their work provided just the counterbalance his temperament required.

Many also were the practical social projects on the field he visualized and started. These projects have resulted in industries for backward peoples, efficient health service, introduction of better seed and improved methods of agriculture, and even in self-government under law.

The conquest of the islands by the Japanese has necessitated drastic changes in the lives of all Filipinos, but those who have had such Christian training as that begun by Dr. Laubach and his colleagues are keeping resolutely on the job.

"Is it the prayers of that Praying Regiment," he wrote to Dr. Jay T. Stocking, pastor of the Upper Montclair Church that helped to support him, "which are working miracles in the Philippines? Everything one starts seems to count and to sweep ahead of him like a fire kindled on the prairie. It is God; it must be God—and a wonderfully ripe mission field."

The tug of the Mohammedans of Mindanao had grown stronger

¹ These include: *The People of the Philippines* (Doubleday Doran, N. Y., 1925); *Seven Thousand Emeralds* (Friendship Press, N. Y., 1929); *Rizal: Man and Martyr* (Community Publishers, Inc., P. I., 1936); *Toward a Literate World* (Columbia University Press, N. Y., 1938); *India Shall Be Literate* (Mission Press, Jubbulpore, C. P., India, 1940); and *You Are My Friends* (M. E. M., N. Y., 1942). Also booklets: *The Philippines Literacy Method*, *Letters of a Modern Mystic*, *Game of Minutes*, *Mindanao, Land of Romance*, *The Young Church of Mindanao*; and many magazine articles.

with the years, so that finally, after his second furlough, Laubach definitely decided there was no use waiting for another to undertake the task, but that instead he must offer himself for it. And so back he went to his beloved Mindanao and to the Moros.

Fifteen years before, as he and Mrs. Laubach got their first view of the island of their dreams, he thought his "heart" would break with the blissful agony of dedication." Now, late in 1929, as he returned after years of experience and with a knowledge of the lions in the way, he shed no tears, yet withal climbed the hills to Lake Lanao with his old-time purpose and enthusiasm.

This time he went up alone, for it seemed best to leave Mrs. Laubach and their son Robert in Baguio. He lived in a little cottage beside the camp that Pershing had built twenty-five years before, taking his meals at the officers' club with the superintendent of schools, the principal of the high school, and the captain of the Philippine constabulary. "All nice fellows," he wrote. "We are all lonesome men. They drown their loneliness in whiskey, and I drown mine in religion."

The Reverend Donato Galia, with an M.A. from Teacher's College, Columbia, was his colleague. Having already spent a year in working out the "type of normal school the Moros ought to need," Galia was of great help as the two began their Moro work together.

The scenery from Laubach's window was glorious—the "sacred mountains" clad in dark-green jungle and Lookout Mountain, a pyramid, bold with green cogon grass. Where a few years ago there had been Moro fortresses, now there were green bamboo thickets. And just below, stretching away for twenty miles toward distant drab volcanoes, was the blue lake itself! The breezes, too, were "glorious"—cool, light, undying zephyrs, caressing and stimulating. The sun beamed with a "cool brilliancy that sets the blood a-tingle." One had to *do* something here!

And there was something to be done in Lanao. Past the window moved crowds of Moros, some dressed in gay colors, some—the women—in black; many men, women, and children in dirty rags, once cheap muslin. These were slaves! One must not say this in public, however; for officially there were no slaves. Nevertheless, Lanao was in the midst of feudalism, a Mohammedan counterpart of the Middle Ages. The Lanao Moros are where our ancestors in Europe were a thousand years ago.

What could be done for these Moros? This was the problem. First of all, Laubach and Galia sought to know all they could about them. "Never," wrote Laubach, "have we so felt the need of earnest prayer on the part of our friends at home as now."

The first month in Lanao was the hardest of Laubach's life. He felt alone, with no place to take hold. He climbed Signal Hill behind his cottage with Tip, his black dog with a white tail, and complained to the sunset. As he wept, with Tip looking up from under his arm, his lips began to move. They found themselves saying: "My child, you do not really love these Moros with your white man's sense of superiority. If you can forget you are an American and think of how you can love them, they will respond." And Laubach found himself answering: "God, I don't know whether you are speaking to me through my lips, but if you are, it is the truth. My plans have gone to pieces. Drive me out of myself and come and take possession of me, and think thy thoughts into my mind." Then the lips spoke again: "If you want the Moros to be fair to your religion, be fair to theirs. Study their *Koran* with them."

This was one of Laubach's most precious experiences in a life full of mountaintop meetings with his unseen leader. From now on, he saw miracles happening whenever he was wise enough to let him talk and hastened to obey.

Laubach told some *panditas* that he wished to study their *Koran*, and now they filled his little cottage. They were eager to let him know the attractiveness of the Moslem religion, while he, on his part, was as eager to reveal the character and life of his—and their—Jesus. To their delight, he talked of Islam's four holy books: (1) the *Torah* of Moses; (2) the *Zabur*, or *Psalms*; (3) *Kitab Injil*, the life of Jesus Christ; and (4) the *Koran* of Mohammed. He told them that he had studied these first three books for many years, but wondered if they had really studied the *Koran*. "We will exchange our knowledge, and so all be wiser," he said, and saw in this "a bridge across which he may some day be able to lead them to Christ."

But first Laubach had to learn the dialect of the province; he could not cross the "bridge" otherwise. So he engaged a teacher of Maranaw, a man named Pambaya, an "honest Moro who once was convicted of murder, sentenced to twenty years, and then acquitted," who was to become Laubach's "strongest bulwark against all oppo-

sition." And of course, if the Moros were to learn the Bible story, they first had to learn to read.

Finally, almost by accident, he hit upon what he calls the "key." He noted that there are only sixteen consonants in the Maranaw dialect and that four words, each with four syllables, had all these consonants. Combining these syllables with various vowels brought the solution, and the illiterate Moro adult was taught to read in a comparatively few hours.

"I have seen Dr. Laubach," wrote a friend who visited him at Lanao, "sit down with some old Moro *dato* (chief) who had not had a bath in months, and in an incredibly short time teach him to read; and I have seen men's faces light up as they discovered that they could read. For thousands of years, their people had lived in darkness; now they moved into the light. They had been blind; now they could see!"

Thousands upon thousands of Moro adults were taught to read by Laubach and his volunteer staff. Books of all kinds were supplied them. A biweekly paper, *Lanao Progress*, was issued to keep the Moros informed of world events, of up-to-date science, and of ways and means of better living, as well as of helping those of real religious bent to meditate upon the sayings of Jesus and his saints of old and of the present day. Indeed, in a surprisingly short time, a very backward race of humans was brought up to date by a simple literacy device invented by a missionary who had never heard of Sequoia of the Cherokees, or of others in centuries past who have revealed similar "genius" when face to face with such a need.

"If you lived here as we do," wrote our leader in literacy, "you would see the miracle of transformation that this town has undergone in ten years: from a village that spent its thought on outlaws, wars, guns, and fights into a little city keen with intellectual interest and the exhilarating ozone of progress.

"The delightful aspect of the situation is that many are now open-minded, hospitable, eager for the new and better vision coming to them from Christ. . . . The minds of people here are being fed with ideals through the libraries and booklets and tracts that go to their doors every week. It pays to scatter high ideals over a community.

"But don't misunderstand me. Under our window daily there still surge crowds of Maranaw people, dressed in their ancient costumes and with their heads full of thoughts of past ages, with

only a small trickling of modern ideas beginning to leaven their small minds. The work is not yet done."

But we must not lose sight of the fact that Dr. and Mrs. Laubach and their associates, in planning for further advances among the Moros, do not depend so much upon the literacy movement as they do upon the large, strong body of working evangelical Christians developing at Lanao and throughout that section of Mindanao.

They rejoice in the marvelous immigration of Christian families and groups into the Lanao region, into Cotabato farther south, and into other parts adjacent to the Moros. They take real pride in the church at Lanao, and have had not a little to do with the development of a working body that aims to survey its area, to know all the people personally, to have a definite prayer list, to print and distribute tracts and Testaments, and to reveal Christ in life as well as in word—doers of the Word, and not hearers only. They tell of the Moslem-Christian meetings held Sunday evenings at Lanao—something that they think has no parallel anywhere else in the world. They ask us to listen to these Mohammedans and Christians singing hymns together, joining in prayer, reciting poems, and listening to a short sermon. "It would be impossible," Laubach writes, "for a stranger to point out who is Mohammedan and who is Christian, for they all speak the language of Jesus." And never have the Mohammedan priests thus far uttered a word of protest against this Christian-Moslem meeting! And the Moros call the new church building at Lanao their "Christian Mosque." And many are becoming true followers of the Master.

Dr. and Mrs. Laubach are looking eagerly forward to the end of the present war, when they can take up again their work at Dansalan on Lake Lanao. As their strength returns through a refreshing furlough, their enthusiasm is warmed and the purpose intensified for great things ahead.

"Give us the resources we need," writes Laubach, "back us as you should, and you will see in Lanao before the year 1950 the most remarkable landslide from the Mohammedan religion the world has seen. But if you fail us, these people will all be left with the old garment gone and the new garment not yet in their possession. Spiritually, it would be doing what Hitler has done in Europe, and I would rather be dead than contemplate the tragedy that this would mean to the Moro."

Meet seventeen other fascinating missionaries in

Answering Distant Calls

edited by MABEL H. ERDMAN

This pamphlet is a reprint of a chapter in the volume, ANSWERING DISTANT CALLS.

Sponsored by the Student Volunteer Movement, this new book was developed by the missionary boards of fifteen denominations, each of which nominated one or more persons to be included in this exciting record of carrying the Christian faith to the four corners of the world.

In the book you will meet William Donald McClure challenging witchcraft in the heart of Africa, Doctor Ida Scudder searching out patients on the Indian roadside, Frank Laubach teaching thousands of Filipinos to read, Anna S. Kugler pioneering in South India, William Caldwell Johnston arbitrating for African chieftains, Charlotte B. DeForest teaching Christianity to Japanese girls, James W. McKean helping and healing his Siamese friends, Brayton Case growing vital foods in Burma, Dellman Bullock teaching Chileans to farm, Harry White Myers helping make Kagawa great, George Reinke Heath making converts on the Mosquito Coast, Chester Bertram Rappé helping to build a new China, Jacob Gass living his faith in India, the paralyzed Bishop Schereschewsky translating the Bible into Chinese, Searle Bates teaching in war-torn China, Harold Stover Kulp demonstrating pole vaulting to African village boys, Susan Bauernfeind helping the mill girls and orphans of Tokio, Regina Bigler handling 37,000 cases a year in her Canton dispensary. . . .

In each of these exciting stories, you will see Christian faith in action. No collection of "heroes' tales" could be more challenging, more inspiring than these lives of men and women devoted to service to others. Their achievements are vivid examples for us in these days of how we can, and must, put religion into everyday life.

ANSWERING DISTANT CALLS is available through your denominational bookstore.

\$1.50

Published for Student Volunteer Movement by

ASSOCIATION PRESS

347 Madison Avenue.

New York City